

Rep. David Price
Statement on Health Insurance Reform
March 22, 2010

“Once to every man and nation,” wrote the great abolitionist poet James Russell Lowell, “comes the moment to decide.”

Madame Speaker, there are moments in history when it becomes clear that we simply cannot wait any longer to do what is right. When we have the opportunity to take a significant step to make our country better, the sort of opportunity that comes only a few times in a lifetime. We face such a moment tonight.

Our health insurance system is falling far short of the American peoples’ basic needs. It isn’t working for families, who have seen their insurance premiums increase 75% over the past decade, while their earnings have risen only 14%. It isn’t working for young adults, whose parents’ policies stop covering them in their early 20s in most states, as if people that age don’t need health insurance. It isn’t working for people who have pre-existing conditions and can’t find affordable coverage. It isn’t working for the countless Americans whose coverage has been revoked when they get sick and need it most. And it isn’t working for small business owners who want to provide coverage for their employees but can’t access the low group rates that insurance companies willingly negotiate with large employers.

Over the past year, I have attended numerous town hall meetings and roundtable discussions. I have met personally with doctors and patients, parents and children, seniors and students, business owners and employees. I have read thousands of letters and emails from constituents about this critical issue.

In the course of these conversations, I have heard a rich and diverse range of views on the current state of our nation’s health care system, but one conclusion has been shared by almost everyone: The status quo is unacceptable.

Our current system penalizes the sick. It sells young people short. It puts small businesses - the primary engine of job creation in our country - at a competitive disadvantage. And instead of medicine, it offers seniors the Medicare doughnut hole.

Why, then, would we continue to accept it? Particularly when we have before us a carefully crafted bill that directly addresses the system’s flaws, preserves its strengths, and sets us on the path to meeting longer-term challenges.

The time for reform is now.

In an effort to defeat this bill, some of my colleagues have fabricated claims about “death panels” and damage to Medicare. They have raised the specter of “socialism” and “government takeovers” when they know quite well that this bill leaves the

provision of care, and most insurance, in the private sector. They urge us to “start over,” but when challenged to come up with an alternative, they produced a plan that leaves insurance discrimination in place as well as tens of millions of uninsured.

Reform will save money for employees, business owners, and taxpayers. It will end insurance company abuses. It will let young people stay on their parents’ policies until age 27. It will extend coverage to 95% of Americans. It expands community health centers and increases the number of primary care doctors and nurses. And it will end the hidden tax that the insured pay every month in the form of higher premiums.

If my colleagues don’t want to take my word for it, ask some of the people - right in their own backyards - who have lived through it firsthand. Ask David Swanson, whose insurance company raised the premium for his daughter’s coverage 54% when she turned 17. Ask Blake Anderson, a small business owner who cannot afford coverage for his 4 employees. Ask Libbie Hough, who fears her 18 year old daughter won’t be able to find insurance when she finishes college because of a genetic disorder. Or ask the thousands of Americans who think they have good coverage until they get sick and hit annual or lifetime benefit caps, or lose their jobs.

Madame Speaker, the American people have waited long enough. We face an historic decision tonight, one that will resonate throughout our country, as have Social Security and Medicare, for decades to come. Let us seize the moment for the people we were elected to serve, and for future generations.